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The Rubáiyát of a Persian Kitten

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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The Rubáiyát of a Persian Kitten

By

Oliver Herford

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Wake! for the Golden Cat has
put to flight
The Mouse of Darkness
with his Paw of Light:
Which means, in Plain and
simple every-day
Unoriental Speech—The Dawn
is bright.

They say the Early Bird the
Worm shall taste.
Then rise, O Kitten! Wherefore,
sleeping, waste
The fruits of Virtue? Quick!
the Early Bird
Will soon be on the flutter—O
make haste!

The Early Bird has gone, and
with him ta'en
The Early Worm—Alas! the
Moral 's plain,
O Senseless Worm! Thus,
thus we are repaid
for Early Rising—I shall doze
again.

The Mouse makes merry 'mid
the Larder Shelves,
The Bird for Dinner in the
Garden delves.
I often wonder what the
creatures eat
One half so toothsome as they
are Themselves.

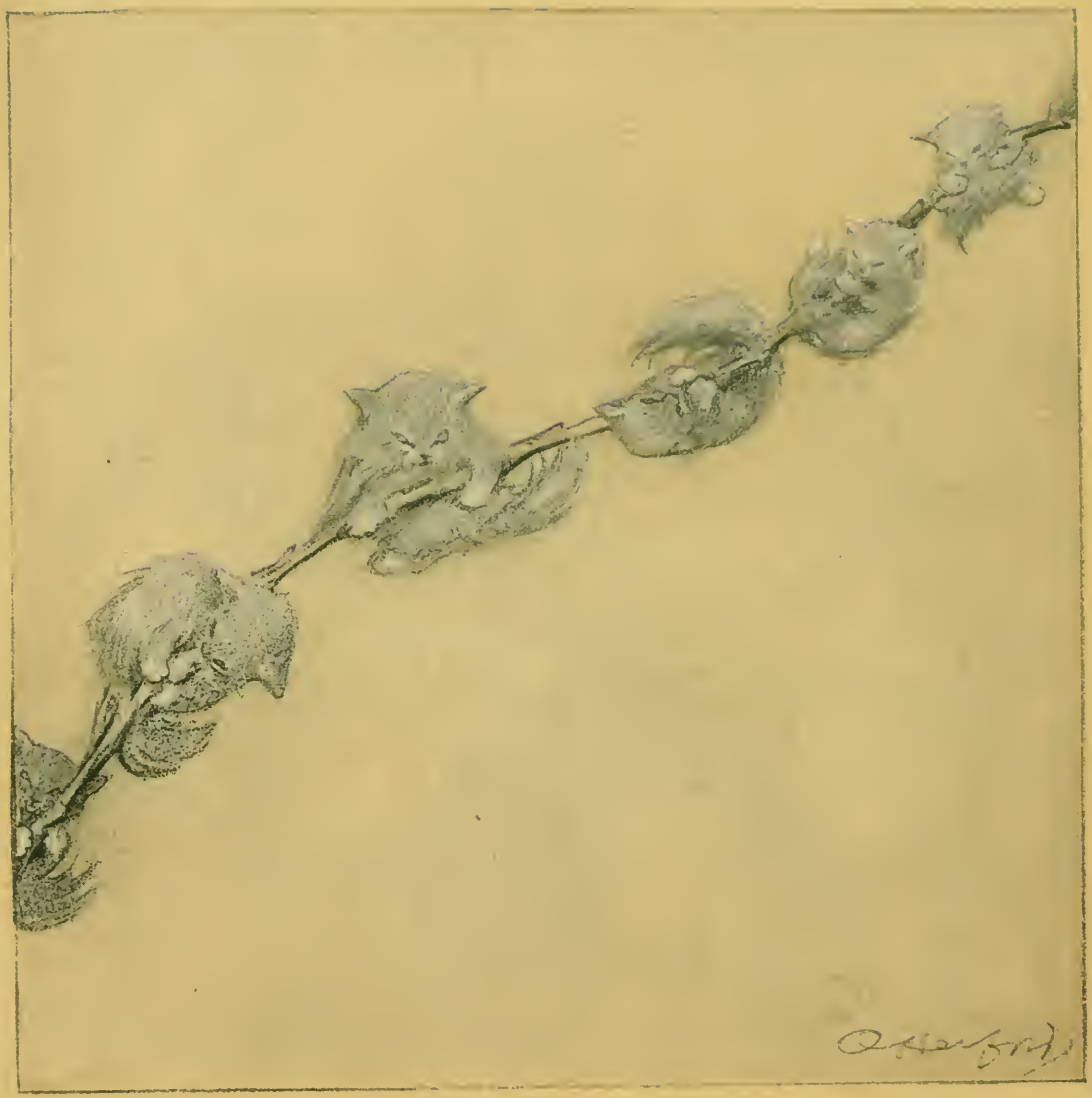
And that Inverted Bowl of
Skyblue Delf
That helpless lies upon the
Pantry Shelf—
Lift not your eyes to It for
help, for It
Is quite as empty as you are
yourself.

The Ball no question makes of
Ayes or Noes,
But right or left, as strikes the
Kitten, goes;
Yet why, altho' I toss it far
Afield,
It still returneth—Goodness
only knows!

A Secret Presence that my
likeness feigns,
And yet, quicksilver-like, eludes
my pains—
In vain I look for Him
behind the glass;
He is not there, and yet He still
remains.

What out of airy Nothing to
invoke
A senseless Something to resist
the stroke
Of unpermitted Paw—upon
the pain
Of Everlasting Penalties—if
broke.

I sometimes think the Pussy-
Willows grey
Are Angel Kittens who have lost
their way,
And every Bulrush on the
river bank
A Cat-Tail from some lovely
Cat astray.



Sometimes I think perchance
that Allah may,
When he created Cats, have
thrown away
The Tails He marred in
making, and they grew
To Cat-Tails and to Pussy-
Willows grey.

And lately, when I was not
feeling fit,
Bereft alike of Piety and Wit,
There came an Angel Shape
and offered me
A fragrant Plant and bid me
taste of it.

'Twas that reviving Herb,
that Spicy Weed,
The Cat-Nip. Tho' 'tis good in
time of need,
Ah, feed upon it lightly, for
who knows
To what unlovely antics it may
lead.

Strange—is it not?—that of
the numbers who
Before me passed this Door of
Darkness thro',
Not one returns thro' it again,
altho'
Ofttimes I 've waited here an
hour or two.

'Tis but a Tent where takes
his one Night's Rest
A Rodent to the Realms of
Death address'd,
When Cook, arising, looks for
him and then—
Baits, and prepares it for
another Guest.

They say the Lion and the
Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshýd
gloried and drank deep.
The Lion is my cousin; I
don't know
Who Jamshýd is—nor shall it
break my sleep.

Impotent glimpses of the
Game displayed
Upon the Counter—temptingly
arrayed;
Hither and thither moved or
checked or weighed,
And one by one back in the Ice
Chest laid.

What if the Sole could fling
the Ice aside,
And with me to some Area's
haven glide—
Were 't not a Shame, were 't
not a shame for it
In this Cold Prison crippled to
abide?

Some for the Glories of the
Sole, and Some
Mew for the proper Bowl of
Milk to come.
Ah, take the Fish and let your
Credit go,
And plead the rumble of an
empty Tum.

One thing is certain: tho' this
Stolen Bite
Should be my last and Wrath
consume me quite,
One taste of It within the Area
caught
Better than at the Table lost
outright.

Indeed, indeed Repentance oft
before
I swore, but was I hungry when
I swore?
And then and then came Cook
— with Hose in hand —
And drowned my glory in a
sorry pour.

What without asking hither
harried whence,
And without asking whither
harried hence—
O, many a taste of that
forbidden Sole
Must down the memory of that
Insolence.

Heaven, but the vision of a
flowing Bowl;
And Hell, the sizzle of a frying
Sole
Heard in the hungry Darkness,
where Myself,
So rudely cast, must impotently
roll.

The Vine has a tough fibre
which about
While clings my Being;—let the
Canine flout
Till his Bass Voice be pitched
to such loud key
It shall unlock the door I mew
without.

Up from the Basement to the
Seventh flat
I rose, and on the Crown of
fashion sat,
And many a Ball unravelled
by the way—
But not the Master's angry Bawl
of "Scat!"

Then to the Well of Wisdom I
—and lo!
With my own Paw I wrought to
make it flow,
And This was all the Harvest
that I reaped:
We come like Kittens and like
Cats we go.

Why be this Ink the fount of
Wit?—who dare
Blaspheme the glistening Pen-
drink as a snare?
A Blessing?—I should spread
it, should I not?
And if a Curse—why, then upset
it!—there!

A moment's Halt, a
momentary Taste
Of Bitter, and amid the Trickling
Waste
I wrought strange shapes from
Máh to Máhi, yet
I know not what I wrote, nor
why they chased.

Now I beyond the Pale am
safely past.
O, but the long, long time their
Rage shall last,
Which, tho' they call to supper,
I shall heed
As a Stone Cat should heed a
Pebble cast.

And that perverted Soul
beneath the Sky
They call the Dog—Heed not his
angry Cry;
Not all his Threats can make
me budge one bit,
Nor all his Empty Bluster
terrify.

They are no other than a
moving Show
Of whirling Shadow Shapes that
come and go
Me-ward thro' Moon illumined
Darkness hurled,
In midnight, by the Lodgers in
the Row.

Myself when young did eagerly
frequent
The Backyard fence and heard
great Argument
About it, and About, yet
evermore
Came out with fewer fur than in
I went.

Ah, me! if you and I could
but conspire
To grasp this Sorry Scheme of
things entire,
Would we not shatter it to
bits, and then
Enfold it nearer to our Heart's
Desire?

Tho' Two and Two make four
by rule of line,
Or they make Twenty-two by
Logic fine,
Of all the figures one may
fathom, I
Shall ne'er be floored by anything
but Nine.

And fear not lest Existence
shut the Door
On You and Me, to open it no
more.
The Cream of Life from out
your Bowl shall pour
Nine times—ere it lie broken on
the floor.

So, if the Fish you Steal—the
Cream you drink—
Ends in what all begins and ends
in, Think,
Unless the Stern Recorder
points to Nine,
Tho' They would drown you—
still you shall not sink.

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